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DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

Ellen JOHNSON SIRLEAF, Assistant Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa, discusses the recently implemented United Nations System-Wide Special Initiative on Africa. The Initiative comprises specific components for action derived from development priorities defined by the African countries. Conflict resolution and political liberalization and reforms are essential for attracting foreign investments and international aid, and to encourage creditors to grant much-needed debt relief. UNDP is reorienting its activities in Africa to include more sustainable human development programmes.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

Despite its abundant resources, Africa has been plagued over the past few decades by numerous social and economic crises. Armed conflicts and natural disasters have hindered progress and created obstacles to economic and social advancement. To stimulate the African economy and to help those countries troubled by conflict, the United Nations is launching its System-Wide Special Initiative on Africa.

Our guest today has wide experience in economics, both African and international, as well as in the field of development. She is Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Assistant Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, or UNDP. Ms. Johnson Sirleaf is also Director of the UNDP Bureau for Africa. Joining me to talk with Ms. Johnson Sirleaf are Segun Adeyemi of the News Agency of Nigeria and Evelyn Leopold of Reuters.

Ms. Johnson Sirleaf, welcome to World Chronicle.

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: Madame, some people might think that Africa is pretty much of a lost cause, with all these conflicts, the money that's been poured in and doesn't seem to have had much effect, newspaper headlines every day practically about social conflict, unrest, all the other problems, including natural disasters, which of course are something that Africans and the whole world have no control over. Can you be optimistic that this Initiative is going to have much effect?

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: I can be very optimistic. As a matter of fact, I think there's enough progress out there in Africa, even though there are many countries that have difficulties and are in conflict. We have many more countries that have started onto the path of a resurgence of growth. Many of them have been undertaking policy reform measures for well over a number of years, and we have several countries now that have shown consistently consecutive annual rates of growth, positive growth. We also know that many countries have been liberalizing politically, and we ourselves have supported so many political transitions, including electoral processes. So I think we can be optimistic about Africa.

LITTLEJOHNS: How much money do you think is going to have to be raised by the international community to make any real impact on the situation?

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: We hope that the levels of funding envisioned by the UN New Agenda for [the Development of] Africa, which has been around for some five years -- it envisioned the annual flows of some $30 billion to support African development effort.

We have not achieved that level; as a matter of fact, it's been declining and it's well below $25 billion a year. But we believe that with some efficiency in domestic resource mobilization and allocation, and with the continued support of the international community, even if it's at the current levels without much increase, that we can see, for the majority of African countries that are undertaking the right policy moves, we can begin to see them experience rates of growth that are in excess of their population growth, which will mean increases in per capita income.

LITTLEJOHNS: What about direct private investment?

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: There is where we really need a stimulus, because official development flows will never be what they were in the '50s and '60s, and we all recognize that. The key to that, we think, is for African countries to create the environment that will attract private flows and private investment. We begin to see that already in certain parts of the continent, particularly in southern Africa, with South Africa being a major growth pole in that regard. We have many emerging markets in those areas where the capital markets in those countries are beginning to develop – stock exchanges, et cetera. Not sufficient. Because many times the stories of Africa get told through the eyes of those that see mainly the conflict, you know, and the difficulties and the hunger and the deprivation. And those stories then paint an image of Africa that is not attractive to private investors. But we are making an effort to tell the success stories and to show where development is working. And we hope that if we can attract, as we are beginning to attract in southern Africa, in South Africa itself, in Zimbabwe, in Botswana, in Namibia, that those successes in the area of private enterprise will begin to tell a different story and paint a picture, and that they themselves can become infectious, so that other countries that are not pursuing the right policy measures will be convinced of the need to do so.

LEOPOLD: Again on the subject of money, I think that – much of it I imagine is also coming from UN agencies, and it seems that they are constantly struggling to cover the last emergency or to raise a new appeal which also falls short, whether it is for Liberia, for Sudan, for Rwanda, for Burundi. Do you see that changing, or where do you think the funding will come from?

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: You're absolutely right. We have seen a shifting in funding from support for development to support for conflict management and conflict resolution, to peace-keeping operations, to humanitarian assistance. And the shift has been so perceptible that it has affected the ability of all the UN agencies to support development programmes at the level that they have in the past. Will that change? I think in the immediate future perhaps not, because we still have too many countries that have not found the solution to their conflict and that will continue to need humanitarian assistance, and there's not going to

be, we think, any major increase in the aggregate of aid flows. So what we'll have to do is to continue to work with those countries in conflict to try to get them out of conflict so that we can see a reversal in the flows. At the same time, I think what was mentioned before, for those countries that have moved ahead and are pursuing the right growth policies, we can try to encourage private investment, not only external private investment, but local private investment by local entrepreneurs. And so I do believe that it will take some time to turn things around for many countries, but I think that if one looks, say, within a decade you can begin to see many of the African countries coming out of their present difficulties.

ADEYEMI: Madame, you talked about mobilization of internal resources in African countries, and I'm thinking here of the huge external debt of the African countries, about $300 billion. Most of these countries spend about 35 per cent of their revenue earnings to service these external debts. So have you taken into consideration the issue of the debt crisis in this initiative?

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: Yes, indeed. As a matter of fact, we too, through the Secretary-General, have been making major appeals to the G-7, the Group of Seven, to enable them to look at the debt problem. We've been holding dialogue with the Bretton Woods institution, the World Bank and the IMF. A large proportion of Africa's debt is now owed to the multilateral institutions. And so, and those institutions, if they are to maintain their own creditworthiness, do not allow rescheduling of debt. We've seen a lot of rescheduling of bilateral debt through the Paris Club and other mechanisms. But you're absolutely right, debt continues to pose a major constraint on African development, and it's in this light that you've been hearing the [World] Bank talk about a new facility that's going to bring debt relief for African countries. And we've been ourselves adding our voice to that dialogue and seeing how important it is that we come up with relief measures that are far reaching, not just the relief on servicing on an annual basis, but that we need to see the stock of debt reduced considerably to enable African countries to have a fresh start. At the same time, we do want to say to African countries that, after all, you contracted this debt and you've got to also be responsible, that when you owe a debt a debt has to be paid. So we think that the relief of the debt must go hand in hand with the kinds of policy measures that would avoid them getting back into a debt problem.

LITTLEJOHNS: But you're surely encouraging some of the donor countries, lending countries, to forgive debts, aren't you?

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: Yes, we are. And there's been a lot of that. Many of the major industrialized countries –

LITTLEJOHNS: Canada, I think?

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: Canada has done, the United States has done, France has done, many of the Scandinavian countries have done debt relief; there have been all kinds of swap arrangements – debt for nature, debt for development. Commercial debt is being bought back through World Bank facility, bought back at a sharp discount to enable countries. And so all of those things are ongoing and all of those things are the right measures to be taken. At the same time, African countries must themselves put into place the kinds of measures that will enable them to raise domestic resources. We also have to do things like controlling the outflow of Africa's own resources. Corruption is a problem, and in many societies we have to address that problem to be able to ensure that our own resources are used effectively and efficiently for development purposes. And so we are working on all of these measures with countries.

LEOPOLD: You yourself said in a recent speech that poverty went far beyond the problem of inadequate income; that it was a matter of exclusion, historical discrimination and inequality of opportunity. What do you attribute that to? And do you see a trend of whether one has democratic elections or not? Do you see a trend of whatever party is in power sharing the resources, or is it in many countries just one, whoever is ruling, dividing up the resources among their friends?

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: We hope we begin to see the start of a trend toward the former approach, an approach that allows more participation by people in those decisions that affect their lives. We hope that we see a trend in creating environments where people can be creative and innovative, and that they can take responsibility for their own lives, with the support of their Governments, through the right policies, through the right kinds of assistance programmes. Yes, I think there will be difficulties in the sharing of power. In Africa, we have many military regimes that are not accustomed to participation and sharing. We still have even civilian Governments that are quite centralized. And so it's going to take some time to work at that. But I think the pressure for reform is really coming from within. You now find so many local groups – and women's groups are very, very prominent in this regard – bringing pressure on their Governments to change, insisting that they be a part of decision-making. And that, added with the external environment, which is also not very supportive of the old order as they used to be.... I mean, there was a time when authoritarian Governments were accepted because they were able to take the strong decisions. I think now we see a change in which people say that you can have participation and still have good governance.

LEOPOLD: At the same time, you also lamented the lack of leadership compared to the type of visionary personalities that took command in many countries during independence movements earlier this century. Can you elaborate on that?

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: Yes, yes. I do believe that the evolution of leadership development was stifled in Africa. We did have the revolutionary leaders that lead the liberation movements, and they themselves I think did not liberalize sufficiently by allowing a kind of pluralistic society to develop. And so we had following them a wave of military rulers that actually stifled leadership, that concentrated power at the centre, in the hands of a few. And so leadership became associated with the person in power. And to stay in power meant repression. And so nobody then, at the levels that were required, at the local levels, at the community levels, at the regional levels, there was no desire for anybody to want to lead because you became a threat to the person in power. And so that stifling has not enabled us in my view to create a new generation of leaders willing to develop the kind of broad vision for their country. As a matter of fact, you know, you had to stay quiet and you had to stay contained if you wanted to be able to survive in the society. But now I think there is starting again in many of the young people in Africa a new wave of people wanting to be a part, wanting to take over, wanting to lead their societies. And so you see them manifested in the many very successful and well-operating NGOs that are now found in many –

LITTLEJOHNS: Non-governmental organizations.

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: Non-governmental organizations.

LITTLEJOHNS: Excuse me just a minute. This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Assistant Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme and Director of the UNDP Bureau for Africa.

ADEYEMI: Madame, in your speech to the conference in Burkina Faso OAUin January you said one could not start thinking about development with conflicts in countries like Liberia, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, and on and on. And it's a reality that a number of countries in Africa are living with conflicts. And I'm wondering, you know, if the Special Initiative has taken into consideration the need to have conflict resolution and preventive measures, you know, to ensure the success of this Initiative.

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: Absolutely. Under the Initiative there's a governance component, and within that component is a programme that will aim at conflict management. In that regard, we'd be working with continental institutions such as the OAU to help to strengthen their capacity to be able to deal with this problem in countries. So that's certainly a part of it.

LEOPOLD: This is now the third year that someone has talked about conflict resolution in the OAU. There was the Nigerian Ambassador, and the British Ambassador had a large meeting about getting some more experts and building up that conflict resolution

department in the OAU. The Secretary-General has put a lot of work into it. Why isn't it functioning?

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: I don't think the OAU has got sufficient support for its effort. And I think that's disappointing because the OAU has changed considerably. If you hear the speeches by the Secretary-General, or you even hear the Member States at meetings, whereas before there was the cloak of sovereignty that prevented any kind of intervention or work by the OAU in matters relating to what could be called the internal affairs of a country, today there's openness about it. The OAU has missions in Burundi and Somalia, they've been supporting efforts in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and they have the support of the heads of States and Governments in what they're doing. And there's a recognition that only regional institutions that know the local circumstances can really be truly effective in resolving problems. So, but there hasn't been the support. The OAU established a peace fund. I don't think there have been many contributions to that fund. We hope we can again try to stimulate a bit more interest.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ms. Johnson Sirleaf, here in the West there's a lot of concern about what seems to be a lack of democracy in Africa. In fact, countries that had relatively democratic systems in some cases have regressed. I don't suppose that there's anything that UNDP can do, is there, to encourage the development of democracy in the continent?

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: Oh yes, we can. And we hope we can be an instrument of that.

LITTLEJOHNS: In what way?

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: We hope to support programmes of political transition that will involve participation by working with the empowerment of civil society, getting them involved in their society. We hope we can help to build institutions and reform judiciary systems to ensure that rights are protected and preserved. We hope we can work with parliaments to strengthen their capacity to understand the policy issues and to deal with them. We hope we can improve communications in a society so that a free press can become much more issues oriented and can begin to communicate to the public what are some of the matters that are going on in governance. So these are the things we can do. Now, we can only do this, of course, if we're accepted, and if the Governments concerned and the institutions concerned are willing to an openness in the societies. So we are going to move consistent with the country's own readiness to be able to proceed. But there are many that we think are already demonstrating that they want to do this. And we work very closely with the Department of Political Affairs here in the UN, which has given us some very strong support. When we feel we're on tricky ground and can't deal with a political issue we go to them and they help us out.

ADEYEMI: This is not the first time that the UN has attempted to help Africa. There was the UN Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (UNPAAERD), 1986 to 1990. And there's also the New Agenda for Development, which you talked about. If these programmes had succeeded, there probably would be no need for this Special Initiative. So I'm wondering how you intend to mobilize a lot of support for this Special Initiative to ensure its success.

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: That's exactly the difference, because UNPAAERD and UN/NADAF represented a broad compact between Africa and Africa's development partners. There was no concrete programme that was advanced. This Special Initiative in fact is to give concreteness to UN/NADAF. It is not anything different or parallel to UN/NADAF. It is giving life to UN/NADAF.

LITTLEJOHNS: UN/NADAF? What's UN/NADAF?

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: United Nations New Agenda for [the Development of] Africa. Like I say, it was a compact agreed between Africa and her partners. And, more importantly, this Initiative is meant to make the UN system function differently, to work in a collaborative way to support Africa's own chosen priorities. The key to this initiative is not so much the UN or any other institutions outside; the key to it is Africa's own commitment to those identified priorities, Africa's willingness to reallocate its own resources to support those initiatives, and then the collaboration of the UN system and the UN system with the Bretton Woods Institutions. So in this way it's bringing a comprehensive approach to two or three or four priority areas that everyone agrees are important for being able to meet the challenges of African development.

ADEYEMI: But I guess you will also need the support of the donor community.

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: Absolutely.

ADEYEMI: And there is a – I mean, it's a reality that there is a sort of donor fatigue all around the world now. So I don't know how you intend to, you know, balance that.

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: You know, we hear that, and yes, we all talk about donor fatigue. First of all, you're absolutely right. The partnership with the donor community is an imperative. If you don't get that support, none of us – because we all, even the Bretton Woods Institutions, get our support from the donor community. But I do believe that when the priorities are right and the programmes are right and the policies are right, money does flow. Uganda is a clear example. Today, I think Uganda has more bilateral assistance than it can spend – because of their own capacity limitations – because people feel that the conditions there are right. The private sector in Uganda and many other places – South Africa is attracting lots of resources, more than it can probably spend, because people feel

the environment is right. So yes, there's donor fatigue, yes, there has been, you know, a reduction in aid flows. But I think when the country is on the right path — with the right policy, with a committed leadership, and leadership by example, that not only what they say but they *do* what they say — I think that they are going to get support.

LITTLEJOHNS: Apart from the departure of the dictator Idi Amin, what's happened in Uganda to make that such an attractive place for donors now?

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: Right policies, consistency in policy, attracting private sector, enabling people, entrepreneurs, to foster, putting in place, like I said, right macroeconomic policies. All of those have added to that. And I think there —

LITTLEJOHNS: With a considerable assist from UNDP, I take it.

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: Some support. UNDP has not been a major player in terms of our level of assistance. I think the Bretton Woods institutions have been much more instrumental. And there's the African Development Bank and other multilaterals. But UNDP has been helpful, particularly in the area of HIV/AIDS, which as you know is one of the major constraints on development in Uganda and in many places in Africa. And I hope we've been very helpful to them in addressing that problem. And we continue to help them in matters relating to civil service reform. Our technical assistance in areas that they have selected enables them to strengthen their capacity. So, but that's just one example; there are so many other countries that can be used.

LEOPOLD: Considering the size of the UN and the size of Africa, how do you allocate where you're going to put your time and effort? Give us an example of exactly what you're doing that you hadn't done before. Or are you just providing the space and the guidelines and the experts for countries who are ready to use them to they advantage of them?

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: No, we're embarking right now on a major change, and the change is one in which we say we're not going to do everything in every place; we're not going to respond to what people want us to do; but we're going to try to influence them to agree with us that all of our efforts should be put in support of sustainable human development. As you know, that's UNDP's new theme line. And that involves fighting poverty, working with the environment, women in development, job creation — those are the four planks under sustainable human development. Our challenge now is to work with countries to change our entire programmes and reorient them in support of programmes in these four areas, so that our resources, even though limited, will have much more impact, much more results, because they're focused in these particular areas.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ms. Johnson Sirleaf, you spoke briefly about South Africa and the situation in the sort of southern tier — Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, et cetera. South

Africa has been called the powerhouse of Africa, and I think it's the only country in the continent which is considered to be developed, or relatively developed. Is South Africa being encouraged to pour its wealth or resources into helping other parts of Africa? Is UNDP encouraging that?

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: Yes, but bear in mind that South Africa is two nations in one. There's the sophisticated South Africa with per capita income well in excess of $3,000, and there is the poor South Africa, with per capita income that ranks about $300, like much of Africa. So that South Africa's wealth will need to be directed first at its own population, to be able to help those who have been denied participation in development. Then I think of course we can use some of their sophisticated methods and institutions to be able to reach out, first within the subregion. And they're doing it through SADC, they're a major supporter of SADC now.

LITTLEJOHNS: SADC, that's the economic --

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: That's the South African Development Community.

LITTLEJOHNS: Yes.

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: And so, yes, they will be, but I think we should not expect that their vast resources are going to first be directed at, you know, an outflow to help Africa generally, because I think they have to improve the lot of their own citizens who have been denied for such a long time.

LITTLEJOHNS: Well, I guess they're trying to do that, aren't they?

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: Yes, they are. Yes, they are.

LITTLEJOHNS: Charity -- what is it they say? Charity begins at home.

JOHNSON SIRLEAF: The Reconstruction and Development Programme which they've adopted is one that's meant to say charity at home, to give clean water and housing, you know, and education to our own people in all of those homelands that have been denied.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ms. Johnson Sirleaf, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**. Our guest has been Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Assistant Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme and Director of the UNDP Bureau for Africa. She was interviewed by Segun Adeyemi of the News Agency of Nigeria and Evelyn Leopold of Reuters. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

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